

## MEN TAKING ACTION TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

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Background: Between June and October, 2001, the UN agency, INSTRAW, hosted an on-line, virtual seminar on men's roles and responsibilities in ending gender-based violence. The name of the seminar was EMVnet. 550 people from 46 countries took part in four on-line discussions. The discussions were: 1. "Men and Violence: How can conversations around men, masculinities and power help us understand and end gender based violence?" facilitated by: Robert Connell. 2. "Building Alliances: Learning from men's pro-feminist movements and gender activism around the world," facilitated by Michael Kimmel and FEMNET; 3. "Making Connections: Connecting ending gender based violence to other development and social justice goals," facilitated by Ruth Finney Hayward, UNICEF; and 4. "Taking Action: What you can do from individual advocacy to international campaigns" facilitated by Michael Kaufman..

The archive of individual contributions plus various working papers on the topic can be found at: [http://www.un\\_instraw.org/mensroles/](http://www.un_instraw.org/mensroles/)

Below is Michael's opening statement for the fourth seminar, plus his commentary on various individual contributions, and his final statement.

### **OPENING STATEMENT MEN TAKING ACTION TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE September 24, 2001**

#### I. Strategies for Change Begin with Our Understanding of the Problem

The images rebound in my mind: A man strikes his wife because he saw her talking to another man at a party. A young man pushes his girlfriend to have sex and, meeting refusals, sexually assaults her. A man and a woman sell

their daughter into sexual slavery. A group of tough-acting teenaged boys attacks a gay man in a park or, even more commonly, a boy beats up another on a school playground. A girl's genitals are mutilated at the behest of her mother and the approval of her father. And yes, the intoxicated glint of triumph and fear in the eyes of a man as he steers a jetliner towards tragedy.

And lest we think that acts of individual violence are simply a matter of individual action or choice, there is more: The police who fail to arrest the man who hits his wife. The judge who fails to punish the young man who commits sexual assault. (And the lawmakers who to this day in many countries, fail to pass strict laws against such violence.) The centuries-old beliefs, mixed with economic despair, that pave the way for the parents to sell their daughter. The mix of hatred and intense fear at the core of the identity of many boys and young men that would lead them to act out, to display and to portray their manhood through an act of violence against another male. The customs and practises of patriarchal cultures that justify and even encourage acts of individual debasement. The potent cocktail of fundamentalist (read ultra-patriarchal) interpretations of a religious creed, mixed with despair, mixed with geopolitics, mixed with their own experiences of brutalization, mixed with a reduced capacity among so many men to feel what others might feel (or to selectively feel only what "your own people" might feel and even then you are ready to sacrifice them), all mixed with the demands of manhood (that prohibit feeling fear or weakness, uncertainty or insecurity and which value domination and control.)

Our interactive, on-line discussion to date has highlighted this range of factors at the core of gender violence. At heart of gender violence are the structures of power in a male-dominated society and the myriad ways that men and boys internalize a sense of power and entitlement, even those who have comparatively little social, economic, or political power.

Our discussions have shown a rich array of opinion. (And I'd like to thank my predecessors - Robert Connell, Michael Kimmel, and Ruth Finney Hayward - as well as all the contributors for their thoughtful remarks to date.) Among us, there is widespread acknowledgment that gender violence is not a problem with one simple cause, but has a complex causality. Saying, simply, "it's the result of patriarchy" is indeed true, but it is not the whole truth and, thus, does not get us very far. After all, how does a system of social organization shape individual beliefs, interactions, and actions? And can the myriad of individual actions and beliefs reinforce (or at times undermine)

that social system?

We in this network (learning from decades of feminist reflection, research, and action) largely agree that the root cause of gender violence are threefold:

1. the disproportionate social power of men and, in some instances, the use of violence (against women, other men, themselves, nature . . .) to maintain that power or at least to bolster a sense of power.

2. the sense of entitlement to power and privilege most men experience (even if they are unconscious of this sense of entitlement or the privileges they enjoy.)

3. The social and legal permission and cultural perpetuation of gender violence, to a greater or lesser extent in all patriarchal cultures.

At the same time, as our discussions and the work of a number of us over the past two decades has explored, this in itself is insufficient as an explanation of gender violence. Our work has pointed to a second (and paradoxical) set of factors rooted in the life experiences of men:

4. Both the demands of hegemonic masculinities and the impossibility of living up to ideals of manhood propels many men into a swirl of fear, emotional isolation, anger, self-punishment, self-hatred, and aggression. Within such an emotional state, violence becomes a mechanism to compensate for feelings of weakness and fear and to re-assert a sense of manhood.

5. The construction of a masculinity is built on emotional distance from ones own feelings and the feelings of others. This muting of our natural ability to feel what others feels makes possible acts of individual violence.

6. In many cultures, dominant forms of manhood reject emotions (and forms of emotional release) that are deemed to be weak. Emotions and feelings (such as fear, weakness, insecurity, frustration, hurt) get redirected into the one form of emotional release that is allowed for many men, that is violence.

7. Finally are the past experiences of many boys and men. A huge percentage of boys grow up witnessing (that is experiencing) the abuse of their mother. A huge percentage of boys are beaten or live in fear of physical

assault by a parent or other boys. Such things produce no fixed outcome, but combined with the assumption that to be a man means to be powerful, such experiences can intensify ones insecurity. Violence can be understood as a learned behavior or seen as a way to rework and psychologically process ones own disturbing history.

(As some of you are aware, I have explored these seven factors in more detail. The reading list includes a few references and some on-line connections.)

## II. From Understanding to Action

The first and overall question I'd like to pose to this, the fourth, of our on-line seminars is this: How can an awareness of such a complex reality of gender violence be most effectively used to shape our strategies?

This means that we best think in terms of a diversity of approaches. This is necessary in order to get at different levels of the problem and different levels of solutions. Furthermore, all practitioners (whether activists, government policy-makers, law-enforcement officials, counselors, service-providers, researchers) need to relate to their own society.

I'd like to suggest that we reject any approaches that suggest that any of us possess THE way for dealing with the issue. This is because the language and strength of patriarchy differs between different cultures; the relationship of different groups of men and women to patriarchy varies greatly. How to reach men and women in a corporate setting in Canada will be different than how to reach men and women in rural Cambodia. Their life experiences, issues, forms of awareness, and cultural baggage will be different in ways that shape appropriate responses. As well, in different countries, we are dealing with very different levels of impact of feminism.

Overall, I hope we would all acknowledge that we need responses that include the following:

1. We must start by reaffirming, at the most general and basic levels, that ending gender violence ultimately requires challenging and dismantling the structures of men's power and privilege, and ending the cultural and social permission for acts of violence. This suggests the need to struggle for a wide

range of social, political, legal, and cultural reforms and transformations, some of which directly pertain to violence, others which form its patriarchal underpinnings. This point also includes the need for social services for women who experience violence, to give them alternatives and support.

2. We know that patriarchal relations and values get internalized into the psychological structures of both men and women. Women in much of the world have been struggling to throw off these shackles; men lag behind. And so, one aspect of ending gender violence is the challenge to our dominant forms of masculinity and social structures of gender that bring with them such peril. I would suggest (and I would like your thoughts on this), that in order to successfully reach men, this work must be premised on compassion, love, and respect, combined with a clear challenge to negative masculine norms and their destructive outcomes. Pro-feminist men doing this work must speak to other men as our brothers, not as aliens who are not as enlightened or worthy as we are. And I've been inspired by women who, when possible, speak to men as potential allies and not as enemies or people who are guilty until they prove themselves innocent.

3. Through a range of social institutions all people do the "gender work" that perpetuates male domination. Ending gender violence includes a challenge to these institutions. Key here, is a challenge to institutions and relations through which we raise children. This requires much more emphasis on the importance of men as nurturers and caregivers, fully involved in the raising of children in positive ways free of violence. In other words, some strategies start at home.

4. We can find more productive ways to work with men who commit violence in ways that simultaneously challenge their patriarchal assumptions and privileges *and* reach out to them with respect and compassion. Given what they have done, this presents a huge challenge. But I believe that such are the preconditions for most men to actually challenge themselves and each other.

5. And we need explicit educational activities (some aimed specifically at women, some at men, some at children) which end the social permission and silence surrounding most forms of gender violence. Those efforts aimed at men should directly involve men and boys.

### III. Working With Men and Boys

The focus of this fourth seminar is, necessarily, more narrow than all five levels of strategic responses to gender violence. What are some of the particular issues and challenges we face? And to this, I would say that the greatest challenge is how to actually reach men, that is connect with them and to give them the opportunities and tools to actually change their attitudes and behaviours.

Let me cite one example: The men and women who have been engaged in the difficult work with men who have committed wife assault often report that their “offender” programs have a low success rate in changing behaviour over the long run (although they may be successful at protecting a battered woman for a short time.) Their framework is to urge men to learn about the ways they exercise power and control and to take responsibility for their actions. That much seems good and follows clearly from the first set of factors cited above. But think back not to one but to both sets of factors mentioned above. How would we have to modify the learning environment and the approach to working with these men if we recognize that their actions simultaneously (and paradoxically) emerge both from a place of power and an experience of fear and powerlessness?

Might that effect the language we use? For example, we often refer to these men in criminal language, as “violent men” or “perpetrators.” What if, instead, we follow the lead of Dale Hurst and others who refer to them as “men who use violence?” That is, we recognize that many of them have also experienced violence and that we recognize that while they selectively use violence, in other facets of their lives they do not use violence. Certainly we wouldn’t want this change in language or approach to provide any excuses for violent actions. But might it give us a pathway to actually reach these men, giving them opportunities to reassess their own past, their own purchase of masculinity, and their own current violent and controlling behaviour?

Let me cite a second example: Over the past ten years I’ve had the honor to be part of the White Ribbon Campaign which is an effort of men working to end violence against women. For us the challenge can be simply stated: How can we get men and boys to actually listen, understand, and accept an educational message that violence against women is unacceptable and must stop now. Here in Canada, despite a widespread acceptance among men of the

notion of women's equality and quite a lot of awareness about violence against women, we still have some men and boys reacting with defensiveness and hostility to our message. When we get such a reaction it is tempting to simply dismiss such men ("they're part of the problem," "they're probably violent themselves," "they're so sexist," etc.) However, we chose to take a different approach and to say, if we're having a problem reaching them, then it is our problem. We need to find ways to enlarge the discussion, to find ways to relate to the concerns of these men, to discover their points of compassion, to find language that they can relate to, and to have specific activities or specific spokesmen who will appeal to them. (Of course, some of these men that react against us may well be men who use violence against women. Still, part of our work is to find ways to reach these men.)

So, knowing that, for many men, it seems scary or unmanly to speak out against violence against women. (Or, perhaps, it brings up feelings of guilt about something they did at some point in their lives.) So we find ways to bring this gap. For example, one thing we've been doing for years is what we call our "famous guys poster." We produce huge posters that say "These Men Want To Put an End To Violence Against Women." This has about 100 blank lines, each starting with the word "Mr." These posters are put up in schools, factories, stores, places of worship, and offices. We encourage men to sign their name. This breaks down the isolation, allowing men and boys to know they're not alone in speaking out against violence against women. (And it breaks down the isolation of women as well.) To make it even more encouraging, some versions of the poster include the signatures of famous Canadian men - sports stars, actors, rock musicians, trade union or business leaders, writers, etc. (If you're a man, please visit the White Ribbon website and "sign" our virtual poster: [www.whiteribbon.com](http://www.whiteribbon.com))

#### IV. Questions for Our Discussion: The Framework for Our Strategies

Some of the issues you may wish to discuss in this seminar have to do with the framework for our strategies and programmes to end gender violence: How do we develop balanced approaches that allow us to involve men alongside women in struggles to end gender violence, that is, to see men not simply as part of the problem but part of the solution?

What approaches take into account the complex and contradictory causes of men's violence?

How do we work with men, with compassion, without in any way giving them excuses for their acts of individual violence?

How can men engage in this work without detracting or taking resources away from the work being done by women?

How can we devise our messages to actually reach men and boys rather than result in defensiveness or defiance?

#### V. To All Participants: Please Tell Us What Are You Doing

Some of the previous discussions on the causes and nature of men's violence at times privilege those with an academic training or familiarity with the literature (and the language) of feminist anti-violence movements, and those with a greater command of written English.

This current topic is different. All those taking part - from activists to researchers, professors to police-officers - have valuable insights into what actually works. The key, I'd suggest, is not what words and theory sound best, but what you have done in your community or home, country or workplace, school or place of worship, that is effective in reaching boys and men to help end the violence. In fact, it is often the person on the street, not the one sitting at the desk, who can share some of the richest insights into strategies of change. Some of you will share your theoretical frameworks for your strategies; others will share practical advice. I invite all of you to send us a paragraph or a page. (And sometimes it is the story about a program or activity aimed at women that also has a big impact on men.)

Once again, the moderator reminds us that we want to see as many different



voices in this discussion. So please limit yourself to one or two contributions to this two-week discussion.

## **COMMENTS ON THE DISCUSSION TO DATE October 4, 2001**

Michael Kaufman

Like others, I'm thrilled to see such a diverse and wide-ranging burst of contributions to our discussion over the past few days.

In the examples and comments to date, five themes have emerged:

1. Hope vs. homelessness
2. Opposition by men
3. Opposition by some women to work aimed at addressing and involving men to end VAW
4. The need for diverse programs and initiatives
- 5 The need to mobilize resources

Let me comment on these themes and raise questions for the final days of our discussion.

### **1. HOPE VS. HOPELESSNESS.**

There have been a few notes of frustration and hopelessness: Bert Bjarland. writes of his frustration trying to launch a White Ribbon Campaign in Finland. Writing from India, Barbara Curda says she is "pessimistic" when it comes to "challenging traditional definitions of manhood and men's roles in society beginning with childhood." I know that such feelings have been experienced by most of us at one time or another.

In the face of such feelings, I would ask participants simply to think about the fact that we're hearing from all over the world. I've had the enormous privilege of travelling for my work and have met women and men on all continents working to end men's violence. Over the course of thirty years, a relatively small number of women and an even smaller number of men were busy planting seeds. In the past two or three years, there has been a harvest of initiatives, new laws, public education programs, training of police and

judges, new services for women, grass-roots programs aimed at men who use violence, conferences, and much more.

FEMNET, in its contribution, gives us but one of many examples: “Many [men] are willing to come out and declare and commit their support to the struggle.” In a number of African countries, there are campaigns for the elimination of violence against women involving men.

There are campaigns in dozens of countries on all the continents. And where there aren’t organized campaigns, there are thousands and thousands of individuals working in their own communities or places of work or study or worship.

I’d like to suggest that one of the great values of a network such as this, and other networks such as FEMNET, UNIFEM, the White Ribbon Campaign, the UNDP’s Men’s Group, and many more, is that they break some of the isolation and hopelessness we all tend to feel at times. After all, we’re challenging 8000 years of patriarchal traditions, social structures and personality structures.

It’s nice to know we’re not alone.

## 2. OPPOSITION FROM MEN

Gunnel Sjöstedt Karlsson writes from Sweden about their multifaceted Kvinnofrid (women’s peace) campaign, but notes with concern the “uproar” it caused among men. In a similar vein, Helen Moffett, writes from South Africa of the hostility to, and censorship of, television ads that asked the blunt question “Hey, all you South African men, here’s a question for you - have you ever raped a woman?” The African organization FEMNET notes that we can expect, in doing this work, to touch “some very raw nerves.”

In the face of such reactions, I believe it is important to understand that we’re up against several things. By identifying the range of reasons for hostility or rejection, we can better plan strategies and approaches that have a greater chance of gaining acceptance. From our discussion to date, it appears that the reasons for opposition include:

i) Men who refuse to accept responsibility and question their own actions and views. After all, some of those who oppose what we say are men who are

using violence against women and don't want anyone to challenge them or question their "right" to use violence.

ii) It is a question of fear and an ideological rejection of our message based on assumptions about feminism being anti-male. Malele Dodia of Zambia writes: "It is a very challenging task, to convince those in power that you will not hit back. . . men gang together because they feel under siege."

iii) Shame and denial about past actions. As Russ Funk says, "None of us want to self-identify as abusive."

iv) Rob Okun of the U.S. points out what he sees as "vulnerability." As I point out in my opening comments, vulnerability is inconsistent with dominant versions of manhood. So you avoid feeling vulnerable or, as Rob says, use violence to prove you are not.

v) Not reaching many men is consistent with how some men learn to be men: Dale Hurst writes: "Men dissociate from their own feelings . . . 'Real' men don't apologise, or feel compassion, or take responsibility."

vi) Men fear not fitting into masculine norms or being rejected or punished by other men. Ceylan Orhun writes from Turkey: "Almost all of the local men agree with us [in opposing 'honour' killings] but they say 'if we do not do it we'll lose face and honour within the community. We can not go out, not even to work.'"

vii) All the above reasons put responsibility on the men who oppose our message. But if we are educators, social activists, social workers, counselors, and policy makers, then we must also question how we do our work and how we communicate our ideas. After all, our job is to reach these men. If we're not reaching them, then there must be some things we are doing wrong.

Several contributors suggest, explicitly or implicitly, that one of the barriers is the design of our educational or counseling programmes aimed at men. Often, says several of our contributors, the goal seems more to make ourselves feel as if we're doing something (and are different from these men) than to actually affect change. Dale Hurst writes that we label and stereotype men as "'perpetrators' and 'violent men.' This is the language of stigma and marginalisation. Having done this, we feel better." In a similar vein, Russ Funk says that having "successfully demonized the 'rapist' then it makes

even more sense to me that men try very hard to avoid accepting that label.”

We had one experience two years ago with the White Ribbon Campaign. A top advertising firm had offered to design an advertising campaign for free. They produced a dramatic (and, eventually, award-winning television ad) and a series of brochures. The brochures (and to a certain extent the TV ad) were based on the slogan: “There are two types of men. Those who remain silent and those who oppose violence. Which one are you?” We used it and met with a lukewarm response. No wonder: we had done everything we knew was wrong. We reinforced the “good guy/bad guy” split. With its accusatory tone, we virtually accused any man who wasn’t speaking out as using violence himself.

Gunnel Sjöstedt Karlsson asks: “What I would like to know is why so many men take on a collective guilt.” Part of the answer lies in all the factors listed above; part is in the particular wording of messages. (The worst example is a horrible slogan used by some men in the US. They produced a button that read, “Men Rape.” To which I, along with most men, would say, “No, most men do not rape. Some men rape. Most men have been silent about rape.” I don’t know if the designers of this slogan were trying to be clever, or whether they were guilty about being men, or whether they wanted to prove to some women how different they were from other men, but it is a sure way not to reach men.)

In these final days of this round, I would welcome contributions that address the question of how can our messages and programmes can be designed in ways that undercut these various sources of opposition.

Some aspects of this have already been suggested:

a. Break the isolation of men and boys who oppose violence against women. That is the whole idea of the White Ribbon Campaign: to use the vehicle of a ribbon to break men’s silence and to allow men and boys to see other men and boys opposing the violence.

As mentioned, one thing we do is produce a large poster which says “These men want to put an end to violence against women.” It has numerous blank lines for men and boys at schools, workplaces, stores, places of worship to sign. They know they are not alone.

b. Get the support of high profile men. FEMNET says that, when they run into opposition, “we can also depend on our strong support from men who are our allies to defend us and our course.” Gunnel Sjöstedt Karlsson notes that the Swedish campaign features posters of the County Governor and the Chief of Police speaking out against violence. Vidyaratha Kissoon, in Guyana, suggests we will be more successful “by using messengers which men and boys listen to.” Valerie L’Herrou in the US says “we find men who are role models for this in our state.” The White Ribbon in Canada has, from the start, drawn on prominent men. Campaigns in both Germany and Namibia have featured popular football players

In doing this, it is important to draw on a very diverse group of men, ones who will appeal to diverse men and boys. Most of these men we work with may not agree with us on many important issues. But, I would suggest, as long as they oppose violence against women that must be the key to any campaign.

c. Design programs, as Steven Botkin in the US says, that have two simultaneously aspects: “Our programs support men to overcome the damaging effects of rigid and stereotyped masculinity, and simultaneously confront men’s patterns of personal and societal violence and abuse toward women, children and other men.”

The key word here is “simultaneously.” In other words, we don’t have to chose between supporting men and challenging abusive behaviour. Not only can we do both, but we must do both because we know that both come from the same starting point: the relations of power in a patriarchal society.

Dale Hurst writes, “It is not an ‘either/or’ equation. It is a ‘both/and’ equation. It is possible to both support and challenge men to change. It is possible to both hear a man’s experience of victimization, and also to confront his oppression of others. It is possible to both hold men accountable and provide him with support to change.”

d. Work with respect. Vidyaratha Kissoon says we must ensure our work “is done with respect.” Dale Hurst writes: “Many men will respond to messages if they feel heard, listened to and respected. This should not surprise us.”

e. Avoid “collective guilt or blame.” Use the language of responsibility.

### 3. OPPOSITION FROM WOMEN

This hasn't been a major theme, but Valerie L'Herrou writes with concern "that there is so much resistance to getting men involved in our work on the part of people who have been doing the work for a long time."

Two comments on this is an important point. Opposition by women's groups to men working to end violence against women, or opposition by women's groups to programs aimed at men, seems to be primarily a North American phenomena. By and large, women in the South have advocated and embraced men doing this work and programs aimed at men. As some women have told me, "We don't have the luxury to oppose the work of men."

Secondly, there are many roots to this opposition. (These are women who see the worst effects of men's violence every day. They have fought long and hard for scarce resources. They are suspicious of men taking over.) However, I believe that such opposition is self-defeating. As I wrote in a report I prepared recently: Reaching men (and those boys among whom could come the future ranks of men who will use violence against women), is by its nature an expenditure of public (and possibly private) funds to meet the interests and needs of women. It's not money being spent "on men" any more than money spent to reduce malaria is being spent "on mosquitos."

Common to the opposition by some women and by many men is fear. We need to find ways to address and cut through the fear. Men must listen to the voices and concerns of women. But we will not please everyone. We must stay our course and do this work.

### 4. NEED FOR DIVERSE PROGRAMS

Many contributors pointed to the need for diverse initiatives and, in some cases, for integrated approaches. Camelia Blaga writes from Romania of simultaneous support groups for both men and women and parallel public education through "radio and TV shows, public lectures and newspaper columns, some done by a man, some by a woman." R. Perveen writes from Pakistan: "Our society is not a homogenous one. What works at one place may not be even thinkable at another?" Vidyaratha Kissoon tells us of plans to conduct programs through churches. Ross Wantland mentions an eye-

catching campaign on a university campus where men, wearing aprons, distributed free cookies with a message about violence against women. Craig Norberg-Bohm writes a long and rich list of things his group has done. Ruth Hayward has told of her initiatives within the UN system to bring people together from different countries to find ways to integrate work aimed at boys and men into other programs. From Barbados, Nalita Gajadhar tells of training for all members of the Barbados Police Force. Samir Wanmali of the World Food Programme writes of efforts in the UN to make sure that “gender mainstreaming” includes a mainstreaming of issues and challenges to men.

Within the White Ribbon Campaign we do not prescribe one particular activity, but encourage men and boys to do what works in their community. So we see a creative range of activities, from hockey teams wearing ribbons (as they play their violent sport) to raise money for a local shelter for battered women, to trade unions that distribute ribbons at plant gates, to schools that hold bake sales or assemblies to raise awareness and raise money for women’s programmes, to ads on television, to rock concerts. (One of a thousand small examples of the type of individual initiative we encourage was told to me by a man in a small town who repaired VCRs. He made copies of a White Ribbon video and left one in each VCR he returned to the owner. The owner turned on the VCR and, suddenly, was getting educated about the problem of violence against women.)

## 5. THE NEED TO MOBILIZE RESOURCES

Several writers point to their limitations: R. Perveen notes that “solutions demands resources. Men (Women also) and material and money? From where to get all these at the right time and in the right number.” One thing that can be done, as FEMNET is doing, is “working in partnership with an international advertising agency, leading Kenyan daily newspapers, radio and television stations, to design and disseminate a multi-faceted, multimedia campaign.” I would only caution, as we learned in Canada, to remember that they may be experts in advertising, but they are not experts on the issue nor on the forms of resistance by men.

Bert Bjarland also spoke of the lack of resources. He points to the problem of relying on volunteers since everyone is already under stress working (or trying to find work.) This problem points to the need to, where possible, develop organizations with a professional staff or, within existing organiza-

tions, to direct resources and develop a capacity to work with men and boys. I believe there will still be a role for people like myself who volunteers with the White Ribbon Campaign here in Canada. But if it weren't for our dedicated staff (currently numbering only four full-time staff members) we simply would not have survived and flourished.

But even where there aren't organizations, we can find ways to raise the issues. We may not be successful, right now, organizing a national campaign. So we work in our own city. Or in our school or workplace. Or in our own home.

### THE FINAL DAYS OF THIS SERIES

As you can see from the length of these comments, I haven't followed the approach of the wonderful, ongoing comments by my three predecessors. With those series, contributions were pretty evenly spaced. And so Connell, Kimmel, and Hayward picked up threads of debate and challenged us with well-placed comments and questions. In this case, contributions all came piling in during a couple of days and I've been trying, all at once, to put them in some sort of framework. As well, part of the design here isn't so much for debate on approaches, but to tell our stories.

I do hope to hear from some of you addressing the questions that have come up, particularly in terms of opposition to our message: How do we work not only to undermine the opposition, but to work with the sources of opposition in order to get our message across. It's kind of like the way that judo (or is that ju jitsu?) works: use the weight of the opposition to throw your opponent. In this case, how can we take advantage of what we actually know about men and both dominant and subordinate forms of masculinity to develop effective programs that address and actually involve men and boys to end gender violence?

I hope in the final days to continue to hear from more of you about things you have done. Sharing even the smallest example gives all of us new ideas and lets us all know we are not alone.



Michael Kaufman

**FINAL COMMENTS, October 24, 2001**  
The Emergence of Hope  
Final Comments on EMVnet Fourth Discussion

Michael Kaufman

“If it were between countries, we’d call it a war. If it were a disease, we’d call it an epidemic. If it were an oil spill, we’d call it a disaster. But it is happening to women, and it’s just an everyday affair. It is violence against women. It is sexual harassment at work and sexual abuse of the young. It is the beating or the blow that millions of women suffer each and every day. It is rape at home or on a date. It is murder.

“There’s no secret enemy pulling the trigger. No unseen virus that leads to death. It is only men. Not all men, but far too many men. In some countries most men will never be violent against a woman; in others, the majority of men take it as their birthright to do what they want, when they want, to women.”

These were words I wrote a decade ago in the launching of the first White Ribbon Campaign in Canada. As I think about our fourth on-line discussion, especially against the backdrop of still-unfolding horrific events, three things in particular strike me.

First: I don’t want to sound glib, nor do I feel matter-of-fact about the terror attacks in New York and the escalating war in Afghanistan. But the issues that have brought us together for our on-line discussion have a terrible quality that far exceed and, unfortunately, will far outlive these current events.

This isn’t a matter of debating “which is worse” or comparing body counts. Concern for any human suffering at the hands of fellow humans need not be justified nor be ranked. My point is simple: that even in these times which are particularly difficult for our colleagues in both the United States and parts of South Asia, our dedication to struggle against all forms of violence against

women is as just a concern and as important a preoccupation as it has ever been.

Second: The issue of gender-based violence is, indeed, especially relevant today. I have heard the terrorist attacks of September 11 described in many ways, using many adjectives, some correct, others not. The one thing I have never heard on the lips of a politician or in the media is something more simple, basic, and timeless than all the geo-political or religious or cultural or psychological explanations. It is this: these were acts of men's violence.

The possibility of men committing such acts of violence, the sense of entitlement to take lives, the lack of empathy . . . all these things and more have been the subject of our four on-line discussions.

Third: A decade ago, when I wrote the words I quoted at the beginning, one of the most pressing concerns was the almost-total silence of men about the world-wide epidemic of violence against women. There were a few "treatment" programs for men who had committed acts of violence against women. There were a few limited prevention programs.

Now, a scant ten years later, as contributions to our on-line attest, there is a surge of interest. A trickle of efforts first became a stream and now is a river: New campaigns. New educational initiatives. New research. New forms of cooperation between women and men. In the last three days alone, I've received email from nascent campaigns in Zambia, the Philippines, and Brazil. Our on-line forum featured contributions from around the world. Local efforts and national campaigns involving and addressing men and boys are unfolding everywhere. Multi-country, regional cooperation, in central and southern Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, and Latin America is starting to appear.

This is not only a big change, but one which might be thought of as a world historic development. It is a challenge to one of the cornerstones of patriarchal culture, a cornerstone dating back eight thousand years. The challenge, of course started with women's activism in the 1970s; this activism continues to propel international efforts against violence against women. But now something new is emerging with conviction and force: men's own voices in breaking the silence about violence against women.

In my contribution written a day before the end of our series, I attempted to

summarize the themes of the contributions, referring to the many contributions. I won't reiterate those points here. I would, however, like to thank all the contributors and the other facilitators. I would like to acknowledge everyone who has made the effort to follow the discussions. I would like to thank James Lang and also Rebecca Landbury, who have led this effort from INSTRAW in the Dominican Republic.

And I would like to give voice to a current of hope this is beginning to pick of strength and purpose. Our on-line discussion was but a little eddy, a little part of this river of activities addressing and involving men in ending gender-based violence. But it is a contribution. A river of hope against an 8000-year old landscape, is a river that needs to be fed, and is being fed, by us and our sisters and brothers around the world.

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